



SOUTHWEST

American Southwest, 1993

It's been a good year for crops. Plenty of rain. The pine nut harvest is a record high. Everyone in the Navajo nation is well stocked for food. But something is going on.

A 21-year-old Navajo woman athlete in excellent condition collapses. She can't breathe. Her lungs fill up with fluid immediately and she dies. Five days later her fiancé—also an athlete in peak condition and also a Navajo—dies on the way to her funeral. Her brother and his wife also contract the disease. Reports come in that other healthy Navajo Indians are also dying of sudden respiratory failure. Alarm bells are going off in the Southwest. What's going on?

You decide to investigate. You arrive at the woman's home and

look around. Could it be that she was being poisoned? You look for open containers of chemicals. When you open the door, you notice dark pellets everywhere. There is a container of kitchen cleanser opened on the counter. In the pantry there are sacks of grains, nuts, and dried fruits. The sacks appear to have been gnawed through.

Someone enters the house. You turn quickly. It is an old shaman who tells you that this kind of sickness is not new. It has happened before—whenever the rains are plentiful and the pine nut harvests are bountiful.

Scientists struggle to discover what is causing the epidemic. You think you know. What's going on? How can you stop its spread?

PLAGUE

clues

Use these clues ...

Evidence:

- ▶ Pellets were everywhere.
- ▶ Record pine nut harvest.
- ▶ Bags of grain, nuts, and dried fruit were gnawed open.
- ▶ Open bottle of kitchen cleanser
- ▶ What did the victims have in common?
They were Navajos. They were otherwise healthy. They lived in rural areas.
- ▶ The sickness has happened before when harvests were plentiful.

(Answer is on inside back cover)

Activity

How would you stop an outbreak? Write a short story depicting a mysterious outbreak. Where is the setting for the outbreak? How does it spread? What happens to the victims? Then come up with a step-by-step plan to stop your virus from spreading.